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INFO RUEHGZ/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE 0273
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0755
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RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE 0024
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SUBJECT: Another Fujian Community Grapples with Unwanted Wastewater
Treatment Plant

REF A) Guangzhou 553 and previous

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11. (U) Summary. Residents of Chang'an Village oppose government plans to build a wastewater treatment plant in their community. But unlike villagers of Fengwei Township who have responded with a violent protest (reftels), the Chang'an villagers have sought the guidance of a Fuzhou-based environmental NGO and are exploring legal measures to protect their community. The Chang'an villagers' willingness to consider legal measures stems from earlier, successful collaboration with the environmental NGO in utilizing the courts to deal with a polluting enterprise in 2008. End summary.

12. (U) On September 18, a ConGen staff member joined eight Fujian Green Home staff members and volunteers in visiting Chang'an, a village located approximately 20 miles from Fujian's capital city of Fuzhou. Chang'an is situated on the banks of the Min Jiang River where the river enters the East China Sea. The village is a comparatively wealthy one; its economy is boosted by remittances sent from abroad. Villagers estimate that of the 6,000 households in the village, 5,000 have at least one family member in the United States. The primary purpose of the Green Home visit to Chang'an was to discuss villager concerns about a proposed wastewater treatment plant.

Visiting the Proposed Wastewater Treatment Plant Site

13. (U) Escorted by three villagers, the Green Home delegation visited the site proposed for the wastewater treatment plant and an existing, nearby water reservoir. The water reservoir provides drinking water for the village and has done so for many years. Villagers expressed concern over plans to build the wastewater treatment facility immediately adjacent to the reservoir. They fear that the wastewater treatment plant will contaminate the water reservoir. One villager noted that the government originally planned to locate the wastewater treatment plant only 50 meters from the reservoir. After strong protests from the villagers, the planners moved the site of the plant back an additional 50 meters. The villagers feel that this is still too close. The Green Home participants noted that Green Home had effectively intervened on a

separate issue relating to the water reservoir. When a high speed rail bridge was built over the reservoir, the railway contractor originally planned to allow runoff from the railway bridge to fall directly into the water reservoir. After a meeting in which Green Home conveyed the villagers' concerns, the contractor agreed to install a drainage pipe to collect and direct wastewater from the passing trains into a nearby sewage drain.

Not In My Backyard

¶4. (U) During an animated discussion-turned-debate, villagers described their concerns regarding the wastewater treatment plant. They expressed fears the plant will pollute the village's environment and emit foul odors. Green Home delegation members encouraged the villagers to use environment-related laws and regulations to make a case that the plant's location is too close to the drinking water reservoir. Green Home participants also suggested testing the reservoir's water to establish benchmarks by which contamination could be measured in the future. Villagers responded that they didn't want to find out, only when it was too late, that the plant presented pollution risks to the water reservoir. Rather, they hoped to avert problems by having the plant location changed now. Villagers also expressed concerns that since a growing number of factories are being built in the area, the wastewater treatment plant may not be up to the task of handling industrial wastes if it is designed and built to handle only residential wastewater.

Seeking the Advice of Experts

¶5. (U) Green Home representatives encouraged the villagers to visit nearby wastewater treatment plants currently in operation and talk to residents who live around the plants and to officials who operate

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the plants in order to learn how the wastewater is handled. The Green Home representatives also encouraged the villagers to ask local environmental protection bureau officials to provide a briefing to the villagers about existing regulations and laws designed to protect the rights of residents in the community.

¶6. (U) The discussion took an unexpected turn when a villager showed the Green Home representatives a copy of the government's environmental impact assessment for the wastewater treatment plant. Villagers admitted that they didn't really understand the document. Green Home's science consultants helped the villagers to go over some of the conclusions in the report. One of the report's conclusions was that the village's water reservoir should be abandoned for water safety reasons and that water for the village should be supplied by building a new, underground pipe from another reservoir. Green Home representatives urged the villagers to continue to study the report closely and advise Green Home of any additional questions. Green Home specialists plan to make another visit to discuss villager concerns.

¶7. (U) During the later part of the discussion the local party secretary dropped by. The villagers appeared to welcome his presence and participation in the discussion, which continued largely unaffected by his arrival. The party secretary noted that he welcomed the Green Home visit. He also encouraged the villagers to study the environmental impact assessment and to continue their fact-finding efforts by having further discussions with Green Home and environment officials and experts.

A "Green Countryside" Model Village

¶8. (U) Chang'an village's collaboration with Fujian Green Home dates back to 2008, when villagers became alarmed about pollution from a bio-diesel chemical plant located a few hundred meters northeast of the village. Villagers accused the plant of illegally discharging pollutants directly into the Min Jiang River. Green Home provided assistance in measuring and monitoring the river's water quality and advice on seeking legal remedies. With this

assistance, villagers were able to use the courts to resolve the problem. Following this experience, Chang'an became what Green Home called a "Green Countryside" model village. In addition to providing Chang'an residents with advice on environmental issues, the close collaboration allows Green Home personnel to study and better understand the drastic structural changes occurring as rural areas become increasingly industrialized. Green Home experts noted that polluting industries are often attracted to rural areas where they generally find a more lax enforcement of environmental regulations and a greater tolerance for pollution on the part of the comparatively uninformed rural residents. The Green Home representatives commended the growing sense of environmental awareness displayed by Chang'an villagers, and the Green Home representatives expressed a hope that other rural villages in Fujian's coastal area can replicate Chang'an's success in confronting polluting enterprises by using legal measures.

19. (SBU) Comment: The Chang'an case demonstrates the constructive role that a non-governmental organization can play in providing information and expert advice. This, in turn, allows residents to make more informed decisions regarding their responses to environmental issues that impact their community. Unfortunately, most local NGOs have resource and personnel constraints that limit their reach--especially to rural areas. End comment.

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